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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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BIBLE PRECEPTS

TO BE

SPIRITUALLY INTERPRETED.

"That we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter."—Rom. vii. 6.

A large part of mankind are morally and intellectually lazy. They prefer to reap the benefit of thought without thinking; to have the paths of duty laid down for their feet so that they shall have no more trouble about right and wrong than the engine has about the way in which it shall travel. Night and day the locomotive finds its track laid down for it; and after forty years it is not a whit more intelligent than it was in the beginning. Men would be glad to have the path of duty as hard, as rigid, as invariable and as narrow as is the iron of the railway. Then, how they could sail off, and never make a mistake! unless a switch were left wrong; and that would not be their fault. Everybody wants to go right without any difficulty. "Give me this water that, if a man take, he shall not thirst again; that I need not come hither to draw," said the woman. Everybody wants water, and nobody wants the trouble of drawing it. This is as true spiritually as it is temporally. Men would be glad to have all parts of their life reduced to customs. They would be glad to have a church that should arrange their worship and their duty, and make them plain. They want just such things to do, and just so many of them, to be done just so often. They want the when, the where, and the what laid down with that absolute certainty with which Babbage's calculating machine brings out figures and results.

Men have the idea that a perfect moral character is one in which every faculty is like a wheel in a clock which is so arranged that, being once wound up, it starts off, and goes on ticking all the day long, and strikes at the appointed hours without any mistake. Their idea of being perfect is, never to go wrong. They have very

SUNDAY MORNING, May 25, 1873. LESSON: Rom. xiv. HYMNS (Plymouth Collection): Nos. 1344, 863, 21.

little conception of quality, of executive power, of self-registering intelligence, or of personal control. They have very little thought of true manhood. Their idea is, as I have said, never to go wrong; and the best way to do that, is not to go at all. Things that are dead never go wrong. Stones never go wrong. Last year's stalks of expended vegetables never go wrong. The only thing that goes wrong is that which has life. But life force, versatile, complex, organized, and under voluntary control—that scarcely enters into men's conception of the idea of true manhood.

The majority of men want a priesthood. Say as much as you please about the objections of men to being priest-ridden; if they do not want to be priest-ridden, they want a priest to ride. Men want some one to fix things for them. They do not like the trouble of fixing things for themselves. People like to eat, but they do not like to cook. So men want a church that shall settle their religion for them; and they revile those churches that do not do it. They contrast them with those that do. They want to lean on their fellow-men. They want to have those things which appertain to the higher relations of life settled for them, so that in the minor circles of life they can have their own way, and be at ease. And of course this spirit will lead them to a constant perversion of the sacred Scriptures.

It was precisely this narrow, unreasoning idolatry of the law in the Old Testament, that Paul combatted. It was at this that he aimed some of his severest sentences. It was against this that he excited intense remonstrance. Jesus himself cast his teachings in the very highest mould.

It is the distinctive peculiarity of the teachings of our Saviour that they cannot be taken literally. Therefore they cannot be interpreted easily; and they never can be explained so that you can say about them, "There, that is fixed and settled forever." I will defy any man to take the simplest form of Christ's instructions, if he undertakes to follow them logically, clear through to the end, and not be stirred up by them to act as a perpetual legislator, and subject them to a court of adjudication on account of their difficulties. They do not settle the minds of men: they excite them. They do not end controversies: they produce them. As you will see before I get through, they demand the exercise, in every one, of a rational judgment, acting under the influence of right moral feeling.

No book in the world is so abusable as the New Testament. No book is so helpless against assault, if men choose to pervert it. It is subject to perversion, facile, various, endless.

This was the instruction of the writer to the Hebrews, whoever he was—namely, that men must think; that they must not be passive recipients either of custom, or of rules, or of dogmas, or of anything else; that they must vitalize whatever they take hold of, and impress their judgment upon it.

"When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness [that is, undisciplined—not used to handling]: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

This is the idea that he had of a true manhood—one that was waked up; one that was disciplined by actual practice; by the use of the investigating faculties; by the use of the judgment and moral sense. His idea was that one who had attained true manhood was one who had become accomplished; who was practically expert in determining what was true and what was false, what was right and what was wrong, what was good and what was bad, what was high and what was low. It was his idea that a true man was to be a judicatory in respect to his immediate sphere of duty, and in respect to his duty in his social connections with those that are around about him; and that he was so to employ the Word of God as to receive from it hints and intimations and helps, so that, by the independent use of his own God-given reason and God-established conscience, he should be able to determine, in a manly way, what was right and what was wrong, and follow them.

It is this kind of self-registered manhood that the Bible is aiming at, and that the Old Testament has failed to produce, but that the New Testament is working out, through discipline and management, for men; and if men fail of attaining it, it will be because the Scripture is interpreted in the old Levitical spirit, and not in the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This passage is the recognition of the habitual freedom and activity of that inspiration of God which cannot be understood without study and labor. The principles of moral life cannot be applied without a certain degree of careful thought, each one for himself, in his own place, and in the exigencies of his personal daily life. Nor can any man, in doing this, get rid of perplexities, of doubts, of difficulties, and at times of mistakes.

In interpreting the New Testament, as men are made, and as it is constructed for their use, doubts and uncertainties are indispensable. The complications which we meet in connection with the duties of our practical every-day life imply the same

thing. Men will be uncertain, for a time, as to what is right and what is wrong. They will be uncertain, for a time, as to how to carry out the precepts of Christian life. This uncertainty belongs to human experience. It is a part of the divine economy. You would like to get rid of it; but you never will, except by methods that will unman you. For it is by the exercise of ourselves, it is by the development of our faculties, it is by *use*, it is by discerning truth and applying it to ourselves, that we are to unfold and grow to Christian manhood. The power of self-control and legislative freedom in selecting methods of attaining right ends, and the light of moral intuition which follows the remitting of subjects to constant revision and rejudgment, are the noblest forms of mental activity which as yet we are acquainted with.

I shall now select a few instances from the New Testament, to illustrate the general statements which I have made. I shall not take those parts of Scripture which are confessedly difficult; nor shall I take that language which is confessedly mystical; nor shall I take those passages which are so spiritualized as to be supposed to be above the reach of ordinary understandings. On the other hand, I propose to select the language of Christ himself. I propose to select that language which has reference, not to interior and spiritual states, but to outward and physical life. I propose, indeed, to take the Sermon on the Mount—a sermon which is universally accepted as a marvel of ethical instruction by all parties in the Church, and just as much by all parties out of the Church. Those who reject, as well as those who receive, the Bible as a revelation of God, take ground of admiration for the Sermon on the Mount, and put high value on its teachings. That Sermon is said to be universal; and in this respect it is so—that it is as much believed by atheists as by Christians.

Now, I aver that there is no part of Scripture, from beginning to end, that it is more impossible to interpret at its face without thought, without study, and without a constant perplexing response, than this very Sermon on the Mount. And if this is true of the more outward, ethical instructions of Christ, how much more will it be true of his higher instructions, such as those which are recorded by John!

I cannot now go into the full discussion of all the points which I have raised. I shall propose, if my life be spared, at a later day, to take up the political economy of the Sermon on the Mount in a series of discourses. However that may be, I can only, this morning, touch upon it.

First, consider the teaching of Christ on the subject of the use

of physical force—in regard to the right of a man to defend himself by the employment of other than moral agencies.

"I say unto you, that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also."

Here are the two great elements of personal safety, and the safety of property rights and interests; and the command is explicit in regard to them both. If any man attack you, do not defend yourself; submit. If he wants your coat, give him more. Let him take it. Do not fight for your property. And if he smite you, instead of resisting, turn the other cheek.

This would seem to be very clear. Certainly you cannot make language more explicit. Yet I say that if you were to undertake to carry it out literally, you would pervert human society so that there could be no such thing as Christianity in this world. I affirm this, not theoretically, but as the result of the revelation of God's providence among men, and as a fulfillment of God's teaching in revelation—that great, unending and perpetual revelation that is going on in the human race. It would destroy the whole framework and order of society. I will not say that there could be no armies—that, of course, you understand; but there could be no police; there could be no government; there could be no resisting the animal violence, the belluine passions of the undeveloped masses of mankind. And if there is no right to use physical force in the individual, then there can be no right to use physical force in the family, none in the city, none in the state, and none in the nation. If there is no right to use physical force, then anybody that has anything that is valuable to a rude, unprincipled man, must lie still and let that which is animal among men creep over all that is moral and intelligent and noble in the world. It would remand the race to barbarism. It would leave it to the mercy of an unregulated force, not always in action, but potential, and lying latent, and ready for action.

Men are brought into morality by drill, by disciplinary force. A government of physical force is adapted to mankind in their early days. And when they have been developed, it is fear of physical force that holds them in such a state of obedience that the sword may be sheathed, and that the lictor's fasces may be laid aside.

According to the strict interpretation of this passage, we are not to resist evil. Do you think it would promote the morality of the world to act upon that interpretation? If you were walking the street, and rude, violent men should assail children and women, and you should put your hands in your pockets, or over your

shocked eyes, and go past, and not interfere, would it promote morality? To publish the proclamation to all the brutal lusts throughout the world, "Do what you have a mind to; nobody can resist you"—would that promote morality? If it is wrong to resist the stroke of the hand; if it is wrong to resist the passions of men; if it is wrong to resist evil throughout the whole scale, then we have no right of protection or safety.

But is not this principle given up? Do we think we must not resist evil? H ow about the Modocs, and the pioneer settlers within their reach? Would it tend to Christianity to say to the savage Indians, "Destroy the cottages, and overrun the helpless villagers," and lift no hand to prevent slaughter, or punish the perpetrators of the deed? The whole Christian world has taken the view that brutal violence should be resisted. If there be one thing certain, it is that, whatever Christianity has lost or gained, whatever it has neglected or done, fighting has been one of its favorite ethical pursuits. Notwithstanding this apparently explicit command, forbidding resistance to evil, there never before were such elaborate organizations and arrangements for contesting evil as there are now. Society has been built on the principle of physical force and resistance, from the time of Christ to this day. And whatever triumph has been achieved, whatever progress has been made in civilization, is due, not to the non-resistant principle, but to the resisting power which men have used. There have been some who have not employed this power. There have been single voices lifted up in opposition to it. There have been a few sects organized in favor of non-resistance. In our day, there are the Friends, who adhere to this doctrine. But I doubt whether they can hold their ground. I doubt whether, during the last civil war, they thought they could hold their ground. But the question is not settled by the experience of these people. I admit their worth, and the beauty of their lives. I admit that there are many things about their example which are transcendently desirable. I honor them, and reverence them, and in many respects would be glad to follow in their footsteps, if I could. But their prosperity does not prove anything. If every man in the United States had been a Friend, and if all had acted in accordance with the principles of the Friends, and if then this nation had been populated, and had gone through its colonial history, and through its conflicts with the Indians, and through its civil strifes, and successfully maintained the government; if the nation had developed and risen to its present degree of prosperity with its policy and procedure in the hands of the Friends, acting according to their views on the sub-

ject of non-resistance, it would have been a settling of the question; but you will observe that the Friends are only a handful of men, within the sphere of organized law, formed on the principle of physical force. They are like persons inside of a fort, who will not serve the guns of the fort, but who take its protection. They are guarded by the laws and by the police. The hands of magistrates have taken physical violence out of the hands of the individuals in the community; but physical violence is not taken out of the way. Resistance by outward force is better organized and better attained in the hands of a few than it would be in the hands of the whole community; but it exists notwithstanding. Therefore, whatever the system of the Friends may illustrate—and it has illustrated many things that we ought not to forget—it does not illustrate that human affairs can be conducted on the absolute principle of non-resistance. It does not touch that question.

That in a far-off state, that in the ripeness of human development, the law of non-resistance will have a universal application, I think to be more than likely; but that it should have a universal application now is not possible.

If I were to point out, in a book of household economy, in the month of June, what it was best to do with pippins, and you should go out and pick your pippins, which were about as big as peas, and bring them into the house, and undertake to treat them according to the receipt laid down in that book for the treatment of pippins in November, what success and what products would you have? That the final outcome of government by force, and government by force mixed with moral influence, that the ultimate result of forcible and partially forcible means employed for the development and civilization of men, will be one in which we can by reason and moral sense govern mankind, I believe; though I cannot say that I am certain of it. I think it highly probable that, by-and-by, when the final condition is reached, the world will be able to get along without the administration of physical punishment; but that time has not yet arrived. As far as circumstances will permit, we are to dispense with it, and no farther.

We do this in the household. We govern our children with reference to their ultimate condition, and we use physical force in their development according to its requirements. And so it should be in governing the world. Just as far as it is practicable to guide men and nations in our day on principles of moral influence and intelligent reason, and not by force, it is our duty to do it. In other words, this precept of Christ, if taken in its spirit, is one of the noblest that was ever uttered; but if taken according to the

letter, in the present condition of the times, it kills. We are to come into the newness, the largeness of the spirit. This is the law of love which Christ gave to men—the law that will suffer rather than inflict suffering. Just so far as in your judgment, enlightened by experience and by reasoning, you can dispense with lower physical force, and rely upon these higher instruments, you are to do so; but no man should divest himself of lower physical force until he has power of control by upper and spiritual influences. Force, if you must; love, if you can.

On every man, then, rests the responsibility of education and interpretation. There is no law, no rule, on this subject. You say, "When may I give up physical force?" I cannot tell you. I am not a priest. The thing has not been catalogued and laid down. All the possible conjunctions of circumstances have not been inventoried. And if they had been, I would not let you know it. I would say, "It is a part of the business of your life to find out the way for yourself. You are to make progress by your own efforts."

A boy that has no inventive talent; that is not thoughtful; that is forever hanging on to his father, and asking, "How shall I do this?" and, "How shall I do that?" is pushed off if his father loves him, and is made to find out what he needs to know, or go without knowing it. The necessity of knowing is the making of men.

How is it that the children of rich men are so often imbeciles? The men that are so powerful, so mighty, are so because they were thrown upon their own resources, and had to work. They had nobody to tell them or to help them, and they had many to hinder them; and the obstacles which they met stimulated them to exertion, and they found out their way by hard knocks, more taken than given; and so they became men of might. But they are afraid of having their children subjected to those same hard knocks, and they smooth and soften the way for them. The result is that their children come up without the education which they received, and without their power.

It is a part of the divine economy, clearly indicated, that men must have the responsibility of finding out what is right, and of learning how to do it. It is the finding out, the learning, that develops them. This view is laid down in the political economy of the New Testament.

Take another point of this Sermon on the Mount, which is usually so much talked of as being simple and plain. Consider the direction which Christ gives on the subject of alms-giving:

"Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away."

There is nothing anywhere that countervails that. The absolute command is to give freely to those who want. If a man wants to borrow anything, let him have it; and if he forgets (as he always will) to return it, do not go for it. That is the plain, unexpounded, unmitigated precept.

Suppose, now, a man should say, "It is a thing settled, if anything is, that alms-giving is to be universally practiced, and that whatever a man wants is to be given to him?" Do our friends, the Quakers, who insist upon the literal translation of the passage on the subject of resistance, take a literal view of this passage also? Do they put their hands in their pockets for all that ask of them, and draw it out full? No. "This is to be construed," they say. "You are to take it in its spirit." Yes, I say that you are to take it in its spirit, and not in its letter. A literal interpretation of it would slay mankind, almost. It would well-nigh destroy the business life of organized society. It would break up fellowship between man and man. It would promote the very opposite of that virtue which it is the object of the New Testament to inculcate.

Suppose you were to take away from men the necessity of earning? Suppose you were to shield them from all suffering? Suppose you were to relieve them from the need of all exertion? Suppose you were to speak to the four hundred thousand people in Brooklyn, and say, "To-morrow, whoever wants money, and will go to Wall Street, may have as much as he needs for fuel, for bread, for clothes and for rent?" I should like to know how many would put up their hoes, their shovels, their various utensils, and say, "What is the use of working if we can have all that we want to make us comfortable without earning it?" Would it not produce one universal carnival of laziness? We do not need to ask whether it would or not; for there is a realm, thickly populated—the tropic realm—where there is no winter, and where the sun says, by the voice of a thousand trees, roots and spontaneous growths, to the millions there, "You do not need to work. The banana, the orange, and the cassava, says to them, "Come, we will furnish you with an abundance of food." And what sort of people are they? The whole of them put together would not make one man endowed with foresight, and frugality, and punctuality, and fidelity, and inventiveness, and all those qualities which go to make a full-grown Yankee! We have the most fruitful climate on the globe for the development of men; and with them the climate is the most unfruitful. With us it is the easiest, and with them it is the hardest, to develop robust manhood. In those climates where men do not

have to work nor ask for what they need, they are without ambition, and without a feeling of responsibility.

We have a still further exemplification of this in those countries where the Roman Catholic religion has prevailed, and where charity has been made conspicuous, and has been treated as an eminent virtue by Roman Catholic organizations. In those communities where the whole spirit of religion has run to the giving of alms, and where charity has been common, what has been the result? Self-respect has been destroyed. A universal and shameless mendicancy has been induced.

I do not say that there are no worthless men, that there are no beggars, in this Protestant country; but I say what the general observation of men will bear out, that those nations where charity and alms-giving are prevalent give us the great mass of our beggars.

We have still another example, only it exists in a different quarter. England undertook to legislate so that the poverty or dependence of her under-classes should be alleviated. Having a false system for the disposal of her capital, and for the distribution of her lands, she found that there was an immense under-class of men who could not earn their living, so that suffering came in; and she attempted to relieve them by public charity, and established her poor-laws; and what has been the effect? It has been to corrupt and debauch her laboring-classes. And to-day the foremost statesmen of England stand aghast at the fruit of the literal carrying out of the precept, "Give to him that asketh, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." And not only England, but other nations in which the giving of alms has been widely practiced, and has well nigh wrought the destruction of society, are beginning to take the back track. And they must take it; for the moment you make it possible for men to get money without earning it, you strike at the welfare of mankind, by encouraging and begetting that indolence which is an insurmountable obstacle in the way of a healthful human development.

Take the spirit of this command. Do not put too much stress on the letter. Interpret the passage as enjoining the practice of generosity, of helpfulness, of kindness one toward another. Accept it as inculcating a disposition in every man to look, not on his own things, but on the things of others. That is to say, make it a principle adaptable, according to your feeling and judgment. Say, "As far as I think it to be wise, I will give; I will practice almsgiving as far as I think it will be beneficial; I will not rudely turn away those who would borrow or beg." Interpreted and accepted

thus, it will be beneficent. Use it according to your own experience and judgment, and you will make it a blessing. Employed according to the spirit, it gives life; but employed according to the letter, it kills. Interpreted as the large kindness of man to man, and as a means by which men may help each other, it is full of health and saving grace; but literalized it is full of death and damnation.

"How, then," it is asked, "shall I know when it will hurt and when it will not?" I cannot tell you. It is your business to find out. "But, I am so uncertain. If I only knew, when people came to my door." Yes, if you only knew. You must find out. "Oh, that I could be certain!" If you were certain, there would be no education. It is the discriminating, the inquiry, the taking the trouble to find out, the coming to judgment, that is teaching you and making a man of you.

If it were possible, the instruction of our Saviour on the subject of enterprise and foresight is still more striking:

"Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

Was there ever anything so absolutely plain? Was there ever anything hedged up with such illustrations? Take no thought; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Look at the birds. They take no thought; and yet they are fed. Look at the lilies. They take no thought; and yet they are clothed. If God feeds the birds, and clothes the lilies, will not he still more clothe and feed you?

The language seems unmistakable; and yet I say that if you take it literally, it will lead to demoralization, and to destruction. I should like to see if men who stand still and do nothing are clothed like lilies. I notice that they are tatterdemalions who literally attempt to live without taking thought as to how they shall be clothed. I should like to see if men would have all the food they want without taking thought. As I see them, they are eating out of swillpails and garbage carts, and are running round with baskets for scraps and fragments. Who are the men that are the best clothed and fed? Are they the

men who do not take any thought or care? It almost astounds one to think how very opposite the facts are from what the text says. If you take it literally, it kills.

But look on the other side. What are the troubles of this world? How little happiness there is among successful men who, having foresight, throw their affairs out of to-day into to-morrow! How the great golden wheel creaks as it turns round, grinding out bagful after bagful as the result of their enterprise! How little happiness do they enjoy who give themselves up entirely to worldliness and the amassing of wealth! How do they produce wealth? Is it not by rasping care and anxiety, and by all manner of craft and deception? And who does not know that these things bring unhappiness?

Suppose, then, you take the spirit of this passage, which is, that while you are working to-day you are not to worry about to-morrow; that while you are seeking your food and clothing in the present, you are not to fret about the future. It does not mean that you are to forego vigilance and exertion. How is it that the birds are fed? I have noticed that they always get up early, and hunt for their food. God has provided for them. He feeds my robins, but I see that when they are hungry they go and pick up angleworms on my lawn. God clothes my lilies; but I have to plant them, and see that they have a chance to grow and develop. And if you would be clothed and fed you must be active and industrious. He that lives according to the spirit of this passage will be wide awake, enterprising, and energetic; but he will not be a slave to his own prosperity and possessions. He will live in a large freedom. He will not allow these things to be a source of care and anxiety to him. The practice of the spirit of this precept would redeem a man from the thrall of riches. The letter kills. The spirit makes alive.

Look at one other point—the dissuasion from acquiring riches. On no other point is there more emphatic testimony.

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

You will remember that in the Beatitudes it is said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Luke says, "Blessed be ye poor." And you will recollect that when the young man came to Christ and asked what he should do to be saved, Christ said to him, "Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me:

How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" In different places throughout the Scriptures it is taught that riches are evil and mischievous. But would civilization be helped, if all capital were dispersed? Is not civilization promoted by wealth? And are not civilized nations better off than nations that are uncivilized? Are we not better off than the Indians of our Western plains? Are not the people in Europe, where civilization prevails, more prosperous than the people in Africa, where barbarism prevails? It is by the power of wealth that great physical improvements are made. Would progress be accelerated if these improvements were not made? Would development go forward if all roads were obliterated, and there were only footpaths left? Suppose you should destroy, not only wealth, but what wealth has done, and leave the world as it would be without the power of wealth; would it be better for men? Would civilization be promoted by the destruction of railroads and mills and manufactories? Would the world be better off if all ships were sunk, and the telegraph should cease to speak over the land and across the deep? Suppose all agricultural implements and tools were taken out of the market; suppose agriculture should no longer proceed by the methods which wealth and enterprise have introduced; suppose we were transferred to the lazy life of mid-Africa, do you think we would have reason to congratulate ourselves? Do you think the destruction of wealth would improve the moral condition of the globe? Do not you think that those industries are wise which grow up under temperance, and frugality, and punctuality, and thrift, and truth, and honesty, educating men in morality, and, by serving their physical wants, giving them leisure for thought and the cultivation of taste? Suppose all architecture were destroyed, and men were compelled to live in trunks of trees, and under rocks, and in the ground; suppose all pictures, all statuary, all works of art, all books, which are the fruits of wealth, were destroyed, would it be better for the world? All the world bears the signet of gold—one of the worst masters, and one of the best servants. Although gold, if a man is supremely addicted to it, if he lives to be a *rich* man rather than a *man*, if he lives for wealth, and gives himself entirely to it, is a curse that is worse than poverty, is it not sometimes a blessing?

Now, take the true meaning of this precept. It is designed to relieve men from miseries. It is intended to keep them from an inordinate love of money. It is meant to give them a higher conception of wealth. If this construction is put upon it, in its application to the experience of every-day life, it will be a blessing to

mankind; but if men are put upon a literal fulfillment of it, it will carry the world to destruction.

The political economy of the Sermon on the Mount is absolutely impracticable if taken literally; but if taken in its spirit, it is both practical and beneficent.

I do not say anything about hating father and mother, and swearing oaths, and many other points that are included in the Sermon on the Mount, because I have not time; but I say that this sermon, which everybody praises, which most men point at as the simplest form of instruction, and which we are all the time exhorted to preach like (I have men say to me, Why don't you preach like the Sermon on the Mount? its instruction is so pure, so simple, so understandable), is the most complex and difficult of all the sermons in the Bible. You do not understand the first principles of it. You have not had the discipline nor the experience which is necessary to enable you to understand them. This shows how you have been reading the Sermon on the Mount. You have read it as boys slide downhill. You started, and you shut your eyes, and the first thing you knew you were at the other end of it! No man can take the Sermon on the Mount, and attempt to carry out its precepts in his daily life, and not find that he is in an academy which drills him on the right and on the left, and whets and sharpens him. No man can take the Sermon on the Mount and apply it to his daily life, and not be a thoughtful man, a grave man, a man of judgment, of observation, and of honest discrimination. No man can adopt the Sermon on the Mount as the rule of his life, and not feel that it is necessary for him to purify the fountain of his feelings. It touches the reason and conscience in their very center. It puts every man on the responsibility of obeying it by thought and self-tasking.

The common sense of Christian life, the general influence of the Gospel, has compelled the world to interpret the Sermon on the Mount, not literally, but according to its spirit, by the use of reason, and by the bringing to bear an intelligent moral sense upon it.

In view of these statements, then, I meet, first, the question "Is not this leaving God's counsels, God's revelation, to the interpretation of human reason? Is it not substituting human reason for the revelation of God?" Yes, if God's revelation is a substitute for reason. That is the very question. I hold that revelation is to us what salt is to meat, or what guano is to the field. It stimulates and develops that which is within us. God's revelation is not a supercession of our reason. It is not a substitute for our thought

and finding-out power. It is just so much help as to enable us to help ourselves. It is a spiritualized advocate of human reason. It takes the most positive ground in favor of the right of every man to think, to judge, and to follow his best judgment.

You are responsible for your thoughts and actions; if you make a mistake, you shall bear the consequences; but you have a moral sense, and you must keep it clear. You have affections which purify your reason, and you must dwell in the light of them. Your reason becomes skillful in discerning right and wrong, and you must exercise it.

No mistake can be more fatal than to suppose that the revelation of God's Word is one which leaves men nothing to think of, and nothing to find out.

This has been argued very nobly by Butler in his immortal treatise on Natural and Revealed Religion—a masterpiece of analogical reasoning, showing that the Bible has been constructed on the same principles on which nature itself has been constructed. As God did not make railroads, but left men to find out how to make them; as he made iron and wood, and left men to find out how to put them together; so he has left in his Word elementary principles, and left men to find out how to apply them. And there have been two great systems which have prevailed in the church, which have divided the world, and according to one or the other of which it has been attempted to settle every great moral question. Large bodies of men have attempted to work on the theory that mankind were to be provided for; and other large classes have attempted to work on the theory of Christianity, which is, substantially, that men are to provide for themselves. The one system tends to organize highly; the other tends to decentralize, and to throw upon the individual the responsibility of life. The one tends to make laws and customs and rules and ordinances on infinite points: the other tends to abolish ordinances, and customs, and rules, and laws, and to have men, by practical experience, educated in the doctrine of right and wrong, each for himself. Protestantism says that "love is the fulfilling of the law!" the Church of Rome says that obedience to certain outward forms is essential to the fulfillment of the law, and minutely prescribes those forms, so that men shall have no trouble about knowing just what to do. That Church undertakes to think for men. It says, "I am infallible, and what I lay down you are to believe." It undertakes to arrange everything for men. It says, "This is the truth, and this is what you are to do with it." It has books explaining all ecclesiastical questions. It arranges the details of life, so as to save men as much as

possible from responsibility. It fixes Sunday, and saints' days, and hours for the performance of each particular duty. There are matins, and noon-day services, and vesper services. There is abundant provision made for the employment of a man's whole time. He can commence at midnight, and go through all the twenty-four hours, and find something fixed for each. He is taught what to think and say and do. Under that Church men become machines. The priest takes hold of the crank and turns it, and out come the hours. They are struck regularly, as by clock-work. And a man brought up in this way has precisely as much virtue and manliness as a machine has. It cannot be helped. The result is the same, whether it be in the Roman Church, or under any other system where everything is fixed for men, so that they shall have no trouble under any circumstances, and shall be relieved from all responsibility of self-help. All those emasculating, effeminate (if we may still use that word) methods which lower responsibility, and lead men to lean on other men for guidance and support, are working toward the letter, and not toward the spirit.

Obedience is the supreme virtue under all highly organized ecclesiastical bodies that undertake to do the work for people as much as possible. That much good has been done in this way I do not deny. Men need rules before they have principles; but rules should lead to principles; and principles should lead to intuition. There are these three great stages. There has been a vast amount of good done by the Roman Catholic system; there has also been a great deal of good done by the Levitical system; but after these systems have carried men to a certain point, they cannot carry them any farther, and they become oppressive to them.

I believe it possible for a thousand men, held in subjection on a plantation at the South, to thrive for a little while; but after a time they would begin to suffer and degenerate. And those systems and observances which develop a savage and barbarous race, though they help them and bring them up to a certain point of thoughtfulness and intelligence, from that point hinder them, and tend to cramp and restrain them. When I first plant a rose-bush, a thumb-pot is large enough for it; but when I see its roots showing themselves outside of the pot, I say, "It is too small; it will bind the plant;" and I shift it to a four-inch pot. If, after a few weeks, I find that the roots are growing round and round, and becoming like a ball of twine, I shift it again to a still larger pot. And when it becomes too large for that, I say, "Out-of-doors is big enough;" and I put it in the garden, where it has all the ground it wants.

Now a church may be, in the earlier stages of human civilization, a mere receptacle; but the ultimate aim is to bring men into a condition in which they can be turned out, and their roots allowed to find their own feeding-ground, and permitted to grow according to their own sweet will. It is the design of God that, under his economy in this world, we should be perfect men in Christ Jesus. That is the grand purpose of training institutions. And if a man does not understand it he is unfit to hold the helm; he is unfit to be a teacher; he is unfit to be an interpreter of divine counsels; he misses the end and aim of the Bible, which is not to literalize men and tie them down, but, by instruction, to prepare them to stand, in their own sublime liberty, large enough to see what is right, large enough to know how to apply it, and large enough, not only to apply it to themselves, but to give help to those about them who need it, thus promoting brotherhood, and growing stronger and stronger therein.

Now, look at the different results of the two Christian systems. Out of the system of doing everything for men—thinking for them, organizing for them, arranging the economy of their religion for them—has sprung what? Monarchies? Yes. Despotism? Yes. Schools? No. Commonwealths? No. Commerce? No. Out of the system of doing everything for men has come lethargy. It has prepared the subject to be willing to be oppressed, and it has prepared the Church and the State to be willing to oppress him, and carry on oppression. And to-day, to the toiling masses of Europe religion is hateful because priest-craft and king-craft have combined together to make them suffer.

On the other hand, the Protestant system has run towards liberalism. It has run towards skepticism, also; and so far Protestantism is dangerous. Human life is full of danger. One cannot be born into the world without risks, and cannot grow without them. If you set men free from restraint, they will run riot; they will substitute their own selfish desires for moral sense, and will call them moral sense. There are serious mischiefs that go along with liberty, but, after all, it is a great deal safer than the want of it—a thousand times safer. Men smother without it. There is in its open air and wide horizon much that tries weakness, but its effect, on the whole, is to raise the average of self-control and manhood among men. It puts upon the individual a power and responsibility that dignifies him. It tends to produce in him a sovereignty which by and by makes him valuable as a citizen, acting for himself in his place, under the government. It is this principle of putting men upon

the duty of thinking, and of studying matters of political economy, that has made America what it is. It is that which has made Switzerland what it is. It is that which has made England and Scotland what they are. You cannot give liberty of thought and action to men without producing beneficent results. Its product has been the same wherever it has been enjoyed.

It was the liberty of reason in the Church and out of it that culminated in the Reformation, and brought on a revival of art and letters. In the Roman Church, and in all the world, the truth has been more and more demonstrated, as it will be to the end, that the spirit gives life, and the letter entails bondage.

So, as the Apostle Paul says, in the passage we have selected for our text, "We should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." This carries with it one of the most important truths which can be inculcated upon men; and in this day, when the Bible is so much in doubt, when men are so skeptical, when there is so much talk about the interpretation of Scripture, we ought to be informed as to what the Bible teaches, as to whether it supplies all the truth that any man can take in; so that all a man has to do is to accept what has been thought out for him. I say that the grand object of Scripture is to stir men up to thought; to bring their reason into activity; to make them feel the responsibility of determining for themselves what are those great lines of right and duty which are sketched and hinted at in the Word of God. With this broad, noble interpretation of the Bible, there will be no reason for casting away the Book; there will be no reason for disowning it: the Book will become more and more precious to men as they understand it better.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

We thank thee, our Father, for this blessed day; for its outward brightness, and the beauty thereof; for the heavens above our heads, and for all the glory of the earth beneath our feet. We rejoice that thou hast surrounded us with so many tokens of thy munificence; with so much that teaches us what are thy thoughts, and what are thy feelings, and what are thy joys. As thou hast fashioned the earth, which is but thy footstool, grant, we pray thee, that we may have, from these things which are around about us, some help to-day; some conception of thy bounty and thy glory. Though we cannot interpret the inward life which thou art living by the life of matter, yet, may we be able, by the inspiration of thy revelation, thy power, and thy wisdom, to rise to some conception of thy greatness, and thy skill, and thy love of all things complete and beauteous. And grant that we may have brought near to us, to-day, above all other things, the sense of God in Christ Jesus; the great condescension, and patience, and gentleness of the divine nature; the brooding, tender love, the unwasting kindness, the inexhaustible forbearance of God. We pray that we may look up and see in the heaven that is above us, to-day, the brightness and the warmth which all the winter could not destroy. May we behold in these outward things thine administration. Though thou dost cast down, thou dost not destroy. Though thou dost sometimes hide the sprout thou dost not destroy the tree. Summer and winter are symbols of thy kindness and thy care. Even severity, in the course of the years, is benefit—and bounty is no more. Whether thou art severe with us, and dost chastise us, or whether thou art lenient to us, and dost hold us up by the kindness of thy hand, thou art alike merciful. Both in pain and in joy, in darkness and in light, in adversity and in prosperity, thou art still a Father, chastening whom thou lovest, and scourging every son whom thou dost receive. And grant, we pray thee, that we may have such unfaltering trust in thee that it shall lead us to accept, uncomplainingly, that which befalls us in this mortal life. May we have a faith which shall stand us in stead of all other things, that we may live, not by sight, but by the perception of invisible things—things transcending whatever is mortal. To-day may we realize that the things which are seen are transient, but that the greater realm of things that are not seen is eternal. And may we reach forth toward these permanent verities, these unchanging substances, beyond the things which the hands can handle or the senses understand. May our hearts take hold of the reality of that treasure which is laid up for us in heaven.

We pray that thou wilt draw near to thy servants, this day, to quicken their zeal; to inspire them with renewed faith; to deepen their love; to cause their affections to flow out in their daily walk and conversation, that they may become the children of God in very deed.

We pray that thou wilt sustain any who are under trials. Wilt thou bless to them those trials, and sanctify them? We pray that thou wilt teach those who are under the rod to bow submissively to the hand that smites. It is the pierced hand.

We pray that thou wilt draw near to those that are careworn, and give them relief and release. May they find in God a refuge from every care. And may they be able to cast their cares on Him who careth for them.

We pray for any that are in distress of bereavement; for any that are in anxiety by reason of perplexity and doubt; for any that are tried on account of their children, their companions or their friends. We pray for all, to-day, whose hearts are pained in memory of the past, or in prospect of

the future. May they draw near to thee; and may they be led to trust thee by realizing how thou art a present God in time of trouble. May they know that they have a High-priest who is touched with the feeling of their infirmity; and may they come boldly, and not be afraid to open their innermost life to God, before whom they are as an open book. We pray that thou wilt draw near to those who are placed in circumstances of great responsibility, and who feel the burden and the weight which is put upon them. May they lean upon thee, and take counsel of thee. And we pray that thou wilt more and more prepare them to go forth in that way of duty to which thou hast appointed them.

Bring joy, we beseech of thee, to every household in this congregation. Bring patience where there is trouble. Cleanse each heart from all malice, and all envying, and all jealousy. Minister thy Spirit to every one. May the dove brood in all the houses of thy servants.

We pray that thou wilt bless the labors of this people everywhere—in their secular duties, and by the way-side. May all that they attempt to do for themselves, for each other, and for the cause of mankind, be guided and blessed of God.

We pray that thou wilt grant a blessing to rest upon those who are separated from us. There are a great many that are wandering; that are upon the sea; that are in the wilderness; that are in distant lands. We commit them all to thy sovereign care, praying that thou wilt prosper them, and defend them, and restore them in due time to those that love them.

We pray that thou wilt bless the labors of thy servants in this church. May the superintendents and officers of our schools come up in remembrance before thee. We pray that they may never be weary in well-doing. May all who are taught, and all who teach, in their respective places, be blessed of God. We pray that the young may grow up in truth, and honor, and industry, and prosperity in all things that relate to their welfare in this world, and in the faith of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We pray that thou wilt grant that this week, when so many of thy servants are going forth, the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon them. May all the schools in this great city receive thy blessing; and may all the churches, and all the societies which have been organized for the diffusion of knowledge, or for comfort and support, or for kindness and mercy, be blessed of God.

May all the efforts which are made to diffuse light and knowledge throughout our land have thy favor and thine approbation. May all schools and academies, may all colleges and universities, may all seminaries of learning of every kind, be blessed of God, and become fountains of light and knowledge, and spread all over the earth those benefits which have made us so happy. And we pray that the light of our example may lead nations, through patience, and intelligence, and piety, and true liberty, to great strength.

And so may thy kingdom come, and thy will be done, in all the earth, until the whole world shall behold thy glory.

And to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, shall be praises evermore. *Amen.*

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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